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AUTHOR McCormick, Kathleen
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ABSTRACT

This study is the ninth in a series of reports from the Reading-to-Write Project, a collaborative study of students' cognitive processes at one critical point of entry into academic performance. This report focuses on ways in which broadly-based cultural and institutional factors silently influence students' reading and writing behaviors. Subjects, 57 students enrolled in freshman composition, wrote an essay on time management and had their think-aloud protocols recorded as they composed their first drafts. The subjects' essays were then examined and the subjects were interviewed. The report first examines the methodologies involved in reading students' papers and listening to their remarks, explores some students' and educators' positions on the nature of reading and writing, and explains some of the ways in which ideology functions in a society and in educational systems in general. The report then explores three interrelated culturally-based assumptions which seem to have guided many of the students' determinations of their task definition: the desire for closure; a belief in objectivity; and a refusal to write about perceived contradictions. (One table of data is included; the Reading-to-Write study reference list of references and the interview questions for students are attached.) (RS)

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Technical Report No. 28

THE CULTURAL IMPERATIVES UNDERLYING COGNITIVE ACTS

(Reacing-to-Write Report No. 9)

Kathleen McCormick

May, 1989

This Report will appear as a chapter in *Reading-to-Write: Exploring a Cognitive and Social Process*, by Linda Flower, Victoria Stein, John Ackerman, Margaret J. Kantz, Kathleen McCormick, and Wayne C. Peck, to be published by Oxford University Press. An overview of the Study to which this Report refers can be found in CSW Technical Report No. 21, *Studying Cognition in Context: Introduction to the Study.*

University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

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Preface to the Reading-to-Write Reports

> So I'm just gonna--I don't care, I'm just going to interpret them the only way I can interpret them. . . . Let's just put what the authors agreed on. *Authors agree* -- We'll just -- If at least two of them concur, we'll say they agree. *Authors in general agree that. . . .* But then they don't agree -- There's nothing you can say about this. . . .
>
> Can I leave it at that. . . . Oh give me a break, I don't know what I'm doing. I'm only a freshman. I have no idea what to do.
>
> Darlene, a first-semester freshman

Darlene's college assignment asked for synthesis and interpretation. The paper she turned in--a short, simplistic review of material from her sources--failed to meet her own expectations and her readers'. And yet, a chance to look at the process behind this unsophisticated product revealed serious thinking, a complicated, if confused, decision process, and a trail of unused abilities and discarded ideas--an active encounter with academic discourse that her teacher would never see.

The study presented here takes an unusually comprehensive look at one critical point of entry into academic performance. It shows a group of freshmen in the transition into the academic discourse of college, looking at the ways in which they interpret and negotiate an assignment that calls for reading to write. On such tasks, students are reading in order to create a *text* of their own, trying to integrate information from sources with *ideas* of their own, and attempting to do so under the guidance of a *purpose* they must themselves create. Because these reading-to-write tasks ask students to integrate reading, writing, and rhetorical purpose, they open a door to critical literacy. Yet this same interaction often makes reading-to-write a difficult process for students to learn and to manage.

In order to get a rounded picture of cognition in this academic context, the study looks at the thinking processes of these students from a number of perspectives, drawing on think-aloud protocols of students writing and revising, on interviews with and self-analyses by the students, and on comparisons of teachers' and students' perceptions of texts the students wrote. It attempts to place these observations within a broader contextual analysis of the situation as students saw it and the social and cultural assumptions about schooling they brought with them.

What this study revealed were some radical differences in how individual students represent an academic writing task to themselves--differences which teachers might interpret as a simple indication of a student's ability rather than a student's interpretation of the task. The students were often unaware that such alternative representations existed or that they might hold such significance. Some images of the task, for instance, such as those dominated by the goals of comprehension, summary, and simple response, offered little or no place for critical response, original synthesis, or interpretation for a rhetorical purpose.

The reading-to-write task students imagined for themselves also had a direct effect on performance: it affected the goals they set, the strategies they used, and the

ways they solved problems during composing. And it led to differences in teachers' evaluations of the texts--although, this study suggested, these evaluations may confuse the conventions of organization (e.g., use of topic sentences) with the writer's control of ideas. When students began to examine their options and attempt the more demanding task of interpreting for a purpose, certain students, whom we called the Intenders, showed important changes in their writing and thinking process. These changes, however, were not evident in the text and nor apparent to teachers. Finally, this study showed how students' images of the task were rooted in the students' histories, the context of schooling, and cultural assumptions about writing which they brought to college.

It is not surprising to find that some of the images students bring with them are at odds with the expectations they encounter at a university. However, when the expectations for "college-level" discourse are presented in oblique and indirect ways, the transition students face may be a *masked* transition. That is, the task has changed, but for a number of reasons, the magnitude and real nature of this change may not be apparent to students, even as they fail to meet the university's expectations.

One of the key implications of this study is that reading-to-write is a task with more faces and a process with more demands than we have realized. We see students thinking hard and doing smart things, even when they misgauge their goals or their written text fails to meet certain standards. This close survey of the cognitive and social landscape of reading-to-write in a college class gives one added respect for the students in this transition and for the complexity and sophistication of the "freshman" task as they face it.

The Reading-to-Write Project was carried out as a collaborative effort at the Center for the Study of Writing, at Carnegie Mellon. We designed the study to create a range of alternative perspectives on the process of reading-to-write and on the way cognition is shaped by the social context of school. The following technical reports present the design and collaborative history of the study; analyses of the cognitive processes we observed, of the texts, and of students' perceptions of both; and a set of conclusions, from different theoretical perspectives, on how students manage this entry into academic discourse:

Reading-to-Write Report 1. (CSW Tech. Report 21) — **Studying Cognition in Context: Introduction to the Study. Linda Flower**

Reading-to-write is an act of critical literacy central to much of academic discourse. This project, divided into an Exploratory Study and a Teaching Study, examines the cognitive processes of reading-to-write as they are embedded in the social context of a college course.

Reading-to-Write Report 2. (CSW Tech. Report 6) — **The Role of Task Representation in Reading-to-Write. Linda Flower**

The different ways in which students represented a "standard" reading-to-write task to themselves led to marked differences in students' goals and strategies as well as their organizing plans. This raised questions about the costs and benefits of these alternative representations and about students' metacognitive control of their own reading and writing processes.

Reading-to-Write Report 3. **Promises of Coherence, Weak Content, and Strong Organization: An Analysis of the Student Texts.**
(CSW Tech. Report 22) **Margaret J. Kantz**

Analysis of students' Organizing Plans (including free response, summary, review and comment, synthesis, and interpretation for a rhetorical purpose) also revealed a hybrid plan in which certain coherence conventions gave the promise of synthesis while the paper's substance reflected a simpler review and comment strategy. Both students and teachers, it appeared, may sometimes confuse coherence strategies (for text) with knowledge transformation strategies (for content).

Reading-to-Write Report 4. **Students' Self-Analyses and Judges' Perceptions: Where Do They Agree?**
(CSW Tech. Report 23) **John Ackerman**

Any writing assignment is a negotiation between a teacher's expectations and a student's representation of the task. Students' Self-Analysis Checklists showed a strong shift in perception for students in the experimental training condition, but a tellingly low agreement with judges' perceptions of the texts.

Reading-to-Write Report 5. **Exploring the Cognition of Reading-to-Write.**
(CSW Tech. Report 24) **Victoria Stein.**

A comparison of the protocols of 36 students showed differences in ways students monitored their comprehension, elaborated, structured the reading and planned their texts. A study of these patterns of cognition and case studies of selected students revealed both some successful and some problematic strategies students brought to this reading-to-write task.

Reading-to-Write Report 6. **Elaboration: Using What You Know.**
(CSW Tech. Report 25) **Victoria Stein**

The process of elaboration allowed students to use prior knowledge not only for comprehension and critical thinking, but also for structuring and planning their papers. However, much of this valuable thinking failed to be transferred into students' papers.

Reading-to-Write Report 7. **The Effects of Prompts Upon Revision: A Glimpse of the Gap between Planning and Performance.**
(CSW Tech. Report 26) **Wayne C. Peck**

Students who were introduced to the options of task representation and prompted to attempt the difficult task of "interpreting for a purpose of one's own" on revision were far more likely to change their organizing plan than students prompted merely to revise to "make the text better." However, the protocols also revealed a significant group of students we called "Intenders" who, for various reasons, made plans they were unable to translate into text.

Reading-to-Write Report 8. **Translating Context into Action.**
(CSW Tech. Report 27) **John Ackerman**

One context for writing is the student's history of schooling including high school assignments and essays. Based on protocols, texts, and interviews, this report describes a set of "initial reading strategies" nearly every freshman used to begin the task--strategies that appear to reflect their training in summarization and recitation of information. From this limited and often unexamined starting point, students then had to construct a solution path which either clung to, modified, or rejected this a-rhetorical initial approach to reading and writing.

Reading-to-Write Report 9. **The Cultural Imperatives Underlying**
(CSW Tech. Report 28) **Cognitive Acts.**
Kathleen McCormick

By setting reading-to-write in a broad cultural context we explore some of the cultural imperatives that might underlie particular cognitive acts. Protocols and interviews suggest that three culturally-based attitudes played a role in this task: the desire for closure, a belief in objectivity, and a refusal to write about perceived contradictions.

Reading-to-Write Report 10. **Negotiating Academic Discourse.**
(CSW Tech. Report 29) **Linda Flower**

Entering an academic discourse community is both a cognitive and social process guided by strategic knowledge, that is, by the goals writers set based on their reading of the context, by the strategies they invoke, and by their awareness of both these processes. As students move from a process based on comprehension and response to a more fully rhetorical, constructive process, they must embed old strategies within new goals, new readings of the rhetorical situation. However, for both social and cognitive reasons, this process of negotiation and change that academic discourse communities expect may not be apparent to many students for whom this becomes a confusing and tacit transition.

Reading-to-Write Report 11. **Expanding the Repertoire: An**
(CSW Tech. Report 30) **Anthology of Practical Approaches**
for the Teaching of Writing.
Kathleen McCormick *et al.*

One important implication of this entire study is that students themselves should come into the act of examining their own reading and writing processes and becoming more aware of cognitive and cultural implications of their choices. This set of classroom approaches, written by teachers collaborating on a Reading-to-Write course that grew out of this project, introduces students to ways of exploring their assumptions and alternative ways of represent aspects of the task.

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THE CULTURAL IMPERATIVES UNDERLYING COGNITIVE ACTS

By

Kathleen McCormick
Carnegie Mellon

THE NEED TO PLACE STUDENT WRITING IN BROADER CULTURAL CONTEXTS

In the previous chapter, we began to place reading and writing in a social context involving academic and non-academic influences. We focussed on how students' first responses to the time management text were rooted in practices they had learned--and learned well--in school. This chapter will explore some ways in which both those very educational practices that, students say, influenced them, and their varied responses to the time management talk are symptomatic of broader ideological practices. By largely focussing upon the "interstices" of students' reading and writing--their class comments, interviews and protocols, as well as some less easily studied aspects of their time management essays, this chapter will investigate some of the cultural imperatives that may underlie the particular cognitive acts that our students performed. As Mike Rose has argued, we need to create a "rich model of written language development and production" that will not only honor "the cognitive" but also the "emotional and situational dimensions of language...and aid us in understanding what we can observe as well as what we can only infer" (1985). In short, our earlier observations on the cognitive dimensions of writing and on the contextual nature of task definition must be integrated with larger cultural dimensions in which students learn to read and write.

It is primarily in Rose's realm of inference that this chapter will necessarily be working, attempting to tease out of students' comments more broadly-based cultural and institutional factors that are silently but powerfully influencing their reading and writing behaviors. As such, most of these inferences are subject to being interpreted by rival hypotheses. Nonetheless, by looking at our students' work on their time-management tasks within larger institutional contexts, we suspect that their reading and writing acts can be seen as much more culturally motivated, directed, and constrained than we might have initially thought. Enabling students to develop the strategic awareness necessary for college-level success requires that they become aware of the cultural, as well as cognitive, forces that are directing them to read and write as they do.

In the first part of this chapter, we examine the methodologies involved in reading students' papers and listening to their remarks. We explore some students' and educators' positions on the nature of reading and writing in order to discover some of the ideological assumptions that compel certain reading and writing acts. We explain some of the ways in which ideology functions in a society and in educational systems in general by drawing on the work of some recent cultural criticism.

In the second part, we explore three interrelated culturally-based assumptions that seem to have guided many of our students' determinations of their task definition for the exercise: the desire for *closure*; a belief in *objectivity*; and a refusal to write about perceived *contradictions*.

Learning to Recognize Assumptions Underlying Students' Writing

None of our students' assumptions about closure, objectivity, or contradiction is explicitly mentioned "in" their essays on time management; but their interviews, protocols, and class comments suggest that these assumptions nonetheless motivate many of the cognitive acts they perform. Because reading and writing are learned in rich social contexts, they are always influenced by complex cultural assumptions and expectations, many of which are at best implicit in students' written work. One of the reasons students may have such difficulty developing strategic awareness of their reading and writing options could be because these patterns are influenced much more than we generally acknowledge by broadly based cultural assumptions concerning the nature of reading, writing, knowledge, and the educational system in general.

For example, quite apart from any specific task, many students believe they have to write a "perfect first paragraph" that will unify their whole paper. In addition to (sometimes) impeding their ability to write, this assumption also suggests that students possibly misconceive the nature of writing by confusing the thinking *process* with the written *product* and by viewing writing as a procedure whereby the writer puts closure on ideas rather than explores and develops new ones. It may make their writing a dull process in which they can develop only the ideas they set out in the first paragraph (See Report 8). As one student commented in class when discussing how he wrote the first draft of his time-management essay:

> I'd go back and read the first paragraph. Because, like they always teach you in high school, you should always say what you're going to say, say it, and then tell them again. So, I looked at what I said in the first paragraph and repeated it even better than I did in the first paragraph in the last paragraph.

The repeated rereading of this first paragraph and reliance on it as a gauge for how his paper should develop prevents him from developing new ideas about the subject during the act of writing.

Another student unconsciously presents some insight into what he thinks it is to acquire knowledge. For him, it is simply a matter of discovering what other people have to say and then passively paraphrasing their points rather than questioning them, bringing his own information to bear on the subject, or criticizing the authors' positions. In discussing how he wrote his paper, he commented in class:

> I had to go back and reread each point and I got an idea of where I should start. I then wrote a paragraph about each point. I looked it over really carefully in my mind, and I tried to figure out what it was saying. And then I wrote about it. And I think that worked really well for me.

For this student, like many others, writing a summary seems like an appropriate task because it is straightforward and it demonstrates that he read the material. Notice that he derives a certain degree of pleasure from his achievement, an achievement for which he was not doubt rewarded in high school and which is an important one for reading comprehension. But because of his training in high school, this student, like his classmate quoted above, did not imagine that his finished paper could be dull or tedious to read or that it might not be what this particular educational system wanted him to produce (See Report 8).

Comments such as these imply that students believe that their writing will be most valued if it is something unified and without contradiction; if it appears closed and objective, even though their most interesting positions in their protocols were often where they took up distinctive positions (See Report 6). There are a number of reasons why many of these positions did not make their way into students' final papers, but clearly one of the is that students believe that the educational system wants them to produce texts with closure, without contradictions, and that appear objective. Since such a large number of students suggest that they feel this way about writing, knowledge, and the educational system, we might profitably study how, why, and in what circumstances they are developing such notions, notions that do not necessarily prepare them for developing critical interpretive abilities. We might then share our findings with our students.

Developing Complementarities Between Rhetorical and Literary Theories: Reading for Absences

Our desire to develop complementarities among cultural and cognitive theories of reading and writing is one that many teachers of literature and composition share (see McCormick, 1985; McCormick & Waller, with Flower, 1987; Waller, McCormick & Fowler, 1986; Faigley, 1986; Heath, 1983; Bartholomae, 1985; Bizzell, 1982; and Lunsford, 1980). One productive way to do this is to explore the methods of investigating cultural marking developed by post-structuralist literary and cultural critics over the last twenty years. It is, of course, as difficult to generalize about "post-structuralist" literary and cultural theorists as about composition researchers. But a variety of theorists like Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Pierre Macherey, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton have taught us to look for what is "absent" as much as for what is "present" in any data--that is to look for unstated or unacknowledged cultural assumptions and institutional pressures motivating cognitive actions. Their methodologies and insights can help us develop analyses of our students' reading and writing processes in broader cultural and historical contexts. So, for example, when students are instructed not to say "I" in their papers, as many of our students report they were in elementary or high school, their teachers may have thought they were teaching them a stylistic rule, associated with academic writing in which the "I" is subordinated to "objective" evidence and ideas. Or the teacher may have seen the stylistic rule as a way of helping students develop a more public voice. There is, however, often a gap between what the teacher taught and what the students learned. From this supposedly "innocent" stylistic rule, students report learning that their opinions are not valued, that their essay must sound "objective" instead of "subjective," and that they can best succeed in school by ignoring rather than developing their own ideas. They believe that more accomplished writers are capable of using their own ideas, but they themselves seem unable or unwilling to do so (See Report 4).

This gap between what the teacher is supposedly teaching and what the student is supposedly learning should not be dismissed lightly as a simple misunderstanding. To be told that one cannot say "I" in a culture that continually emphasizes the significance of the individual subject can cause the student to become alienated and disoriented. In "innocently" moving the child into the public sphere by instructing him or her not to use "I," the teacher may be simultaneously (and contradictorily) cutting the child away from this sphere: on the one hand, to be "public" the child learns that he or she cannot say "I"; on the other hand, the public sphere, from its advertising to its disciplining practices, is continually interpellating, in the sense used by Louis Althusser, of "summoning" or "calling out to," and defining the child as an individual. The situation is confusing--others can speak to the child as an individual subject, but the child cannot speak of him or herself as an individual--and the child, on some level, is aware of the situational and cultural contradictions in which he or she is situated.

One of the major tensions of our culture that is surely a "present absence" in this particular moment of learning is between individualism and conformity: the child must conform to the teacher's rules in order to get good grades, and perhaps in order to communicate and succeed in a world much larger than the classroom. Learning to succeed by effacing oneself as a subject is just one of the many social apparatuses that helps to fragment and decenter the subject. Although decentering students is generally not likely to be a goal of teaching syntax, it is still likely to be one of the results because rules of syntax help to determine ways of thought that extend beyond the classroom and that will help to constitute the boundaries of students' views of reality. Such rules are, we might say, one type of *signification* of reality.

The institutional pressure not to say "I," with all its attendant, mixed assumptions, cannot be articulated directly in the actual texts that students write for class; rather, it must be teased out, often years after it was first learned, from the students' interviews, protocols and in-class discussions. Even there, however, the institutional assumptions may be only implicit: the pressure of institutions is often felt to be so natural as not to require explicit acknowledgement. By looking further at these absences, we can begin to explore some of the powerful ideological antecedents for individual writers' goals. Attempting to express the silent, or at least the not fully articulated, pressures of the educational institution and locating this expression in the broadest possible cultural context will help us to *suggest* (because we can never fully determine) some of the cultural imperatives that underlie acts of cognition.

Ideology and Students' Writing

To argue that reading and writing are inextricably embedded in rich cultural contexts is not new; what is new is the insistence that such a context can be illuminated by the intellectual categories developed in the past two decades by post-structuralist literary and cultural theory. Power, Foucault has remarked frequently, resides in the details of social life: in the way people dress; sit in a classroom; in what newspapers they read, if any; in the books they value as "literature"; in their notions of what it is be to educated, elegant, or successful. It is in such details that we can see the pressures as well as the permissions of power. Students naturalize (both in the sense of adapting and seeing as natural) the demands of the particular educational structures in which they are trained. They choose certain strategies of reading and writing for their apparent effectiveness--but effectiveness is a cultural category, defined by institutions, social structures, the everyday practices of the culture. In short, effectiveness is defined by and within a particular *ideology*. Increasing out students' strategic awareness, that is, their rhetorical options and control of their own cognition, therefore, should involve their ideological awareness.

Since "ideology" is both a frequently misunderstood term, and one central to my analysis, it is important to define it carefully. Ideology is frequently thought to be a system of false beliefs, often those of one's political enemies: for example, "The Russians were speaking ideology" (with the assumption that *we* speak the truth and *they* speak out of vested political beliefs). But ideology is not something that only other people have--it is inescapable. Ideology refers to the shared, though very diverse beliefs, assumptions, habits, and practices of a particular society. Most of the members of a given society are not conscious of the ideological nature of their beliefs. They simply take them for granted, seeing them as "normal." For example, most Americans assume that classrooms should be arranged so that students sit in neat rows facing the teacher whose chair and desk is larger than the students' and who is always positioned at the head of the class. Such actions in themselves are not ideological, but the assumptions behind them are, assumptions that students should see teachers as

authority figures who are superior to them, who will "impart" knowledge, rather than "share" or "participate in" it. These "ordinary" assumptions are part of a way of life, a set of values about what constitutes the "good," "proper," or "civilized" view of life. But such assumptions are clearly not "natural"; they are learned, conventional, part of a historical and cultural context.

When we turn to our students' time-management task, we can see how their writing, like all writing, is full of ideological assumptions. Look, for example, at the following extract from a student's in-class explanation of her procedure for writing drafts of her time management essay:

> Through revisions, I found out the author's purpose. Once my conclusions explained the main points of the passage, I found the true purpose and could begin my actual paper.

Let us explore some ways in which an ideological reading could suggest possible origins for this student's quite clearly articulated goals. How could we discover some of the unstated assumptions underlying her position and articulate some of the absences in her discussion?

The phrases, "author's purpose," "true purpose," and "actual paper," are key terms for an ideological analysis. They are "absences," as discussed in the previous section, because the student seems unaware of their cultural significance, unaware that they are historically situated, value-laden terms, not natural truths. They are present as influences on her, but absent from her consciousness as anything that needs to be thought about critically. These phrases suggest the student believes that the text will have a unified meaning, that she is finding rather than creating that meaning by her "revisions," and that "actual" writing can only begin once she has developed a coherent, unified idea. We saw in Report 5 that most students, like this one, expected the material provided by the teacher to be coherent. Unlike this student, however, a number of other students (understandably) found it difficult, if not impossible, to create a coherent representation of the material and did not finally write an essay in response to it. It is important to see that despite the differences in their responses, these students are all privileging coherence as an attribute of texts, indeed a prerequisite for responding to them. So strong and unquestioned is this particular student's belief in the unity of the text on time management that she fails to note that each paragraph was written by a different author. She will not acknowledge fragmentation even when directly confronted with it both by a line on top of the essay explaining that the essay is a series of quotations from a variety of sources and in the obvious disjunction of each paragraph. This student's discussion of her writing process suggests even more deeply rooted ideological beliefs. Her faith in authority and her assumption that she must make her paper echo the "truths" of the authorities traps her. For it requires that she maintain an intellectual passivity and an unwillingness to read the text critically in order to be able to write about it (see Report 8).

If this analysis is even partly accurate, we clearly need to place more emphasis on teaching students to argue with authorities. By this we do not mean to imply that students should not read arguments carefully to discover what the authorities have said or that they should argue with them just for the sake of argument. Being critical doesn't mean being perverse. What we are suggesting is that it is impossible to separate fully the stages of reading to discover "the facts" from reading to develop a position. Since any summary is always perspectival, it is crucial that students recognize the role of their perspectives in reading texts. The student just quoted looks for coherence in the time management text at least in part because she has learned that coherence is a mark of authoritative texts, and as a student, fairly low in the power

structure, she may feel that her safest strategy is to accord the text the authority of "truth" that school texts are generally given. Paradoxically, her desire to be "faithful" to the text, coupled with her apparent belief that all texts are unified, prevented her from seeing the contradictions inherent in the text. If she were more aware of her own assumptions and of their root in larger ideological structures, she might have been able to alter them when she came upon a text that did not conform to them, and she might have been able to see that this text is fragmented and contradictory, not unified.

The Invisibility of Ideology in the Educational System

Ideology is expressed in the educational systems of any society. Educational systems, like any cultural system, are always historically *situated*, that is, a product of particular cultural and historical forces. As such, what students will be taught about any subject will necessarily privilege certain aspects of that subject over others. While this process of selection is inevitable, it is not uniform either across cultures or within a given culture at a particular time. Foucault argues in his essay, "The Order of Discourse," that "any system of education is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, along with the power and knowledge they carry" (1971, 64). Consequently, the educational system can be as much a means of repressing certain groups of people as it is a means of empowering others. While many students and educators may be intuitively aware of the repressive as well as the enabling function of education, it is only when we begin to investigate systematically the ideological reasons underlying the ways in which students are taught that we might possibly begin to change these educational inequities.

Such a task is very difficult, however, because ideology typically functions as invisibly as possible. For instance, we take for granted the practice of students putting their names on their papers. How else could the teacher grade them? This practice, however, emphasizes one belief: that an individual is distinct from a group and that he or she should be evaluated independently from that group. We can easily imagine a situation in which the members of a class worked together on a group project, but it is harder to imagine a situation in which the students who participated remained anonymous. The need to put one's name on a paper or project, the need to say "This is mine" is ideological. Similarly, the need to evaluate and be evaluated individually rather than collectively is also ideological.

In both instances the ideology seems invisible; but its effects--even in the earliest years of education--are obvious once we look for them. During a recent workshop, a high school administrator in English recounted a particularly insightful story that illustrated the subtle workings of ideology. One evening, she asked her third grade daughter, who was writing a paper about a story she had read for English class, if she had talked about the story with her classmates. "Oh no," the girl replied reproachfully, "that would be cheating!" The notion that the individual exists outside a group and must be evaluated as such has been turned into a moral principle by this and many other young students: to share knowledge is wrong unless you've already gotten your grade (by which time the significance of the knowledge is frequently forgotten). One can see that such supposedly moral views carried to extremes can cause one to become authoritarian and elitist, and yet this girl in no way means to be either. She is only trying to be "honest." Moral values such as these seem "natural," "correct," and "unquestionable" to students and teachers alike because they are driven by ideologically invisible classroom and examination practices. The very topic of our study, "time management," is also influenced by the dominant ideological forces in America--it grows out of a distinctively, (though, of course, not exclusively) American preoccupation with efficiency and progress. Ideology is also infused in the language

system of a culture, a system that makes perception possible rather than, as was commonly thought, a tool by which people express what they have already perceived.

Ideology, therefore, preserves order in a society by delimiting its linguistic and social practices. That ideology restricts social practices, however, as it did with the young girl mentioned above, does not of course mean that it is pernicious. Most societies want to believe that they are unified, coherent, devoid of contradictions, and that their customs and beliefs are "true" and "objectively correct"; ideology is what enables them to maintain this illusion. For example, one of our students stated in class, "I don't think when I read. It just somehow sinks in in some strange way. And I comprehend it." This student's apparent lack of awareness to her reading strategies points to a larger lack of awareness that she brings complex sets of cultural, as well as cognitive, assumptions to bear in any perceptual situation. The ideological nature of her expectation of closure and coherence, and of her attendant assumptions that language is transparent and that texts and readers are unified, is invisible for this student. We can get further insight into why this is so when she goes on to explain what she does when she is reading to write: "What I usually do is read through it, and then I go back and I pick out main points and I usually write the assignment from there." This student not only does not question her reading process, she also does not question the strategies of the texts she reads. She talks as though texts, like her reading process, are straightforward, objective, and naturally correct. She talks this way because she has been trained to think this way.

Our culture's belief in objectivity comes out in the most seemingly mundane social practices when, for example, students are told to write a "coherent" essay. Such instructions suggest to many students that incoherence, ambiguity, or contradictions are the mark of a poorly written essay, even though when almost any subject matter is investigated, including time management, one discovers that many experts contradict each other. Having been instructed from an early age to be coherent themselves, students not only expect coherence in the texts they read, they will also ignore the subtleties of an argument in the name of coherence. One might argue (as a reader of an early version of this report did) that this behavior is simply the result of laziness--students perceive the contradictions but choose not to write about them because they are afraid that if they mention them, they will have to resolve them. Such a remark, however, is still caught up in the ideology of objectivity and coherence: it assumes, first, that it is *intrinsically easier* to write about coherence than ambiguity, and, second, that all ambiguities must finally be resolved. Even if students do find it easier to create coherence rather than acknowledge incoherence--a dubious assumption in this case since it took much more work for students reading the time-management essay to create a consistent argument than simply to acknowledge the inconsistencies--we must still recognize that the ability to create coherence is an ideologically produced practice, not something that is natural or value-free. Further, if indiscriminately privileged, it is a practice that can impede the recognition that not all ambiguities or contradictions are resolvable.

We should keep in mind, however, that many of our students, particularly in their protocols, did disagree with one or more of the positions in the time management text. That a large number of those positions did not make their way into the students' final essays (see Reports 6 and 7) suggests not laziness but rather that students may hold certain assumptions about moving from informal writing or thinking aloud to more formal essay writing: assumptions such as, the need to move toward coherence, to summarize uncritically the source text's viewpoints rather than foreground one's own positions, to write what seems objectively correct. That students often wrote simplistic essays while they had developed much more complex elaborations further suggests the power of a dominant school ideology encouraging intellectual passivity. The strength

and interest of many students' elaborations, however, imply that they have enormous potential to develop strategic and ideological awareness and thus a more active relationship to the texts about which they read and write.What follows is an analysis of three aspects of our students' responses to the time-management essays to show the invisible influence of our culture's ideology, particularly our educational system, on their reading and writing. It will focuses on students' seeking closure, trying to be objective, and avoiding contradictions.

THREE IDEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS GUIDING STUDENTS' WRITING

The Desire for Closure: The Failure to be Tentative

Closure in writing means coming to explicit conclusions about a particular issue that rule out alternative ways of conceiving the issue. Closure can be achieved either by arguing against these alternatives or by failing to take them into account. Experts more frequently achieve closure in the former way, novices in the latter. A number of students expressed pleasure in the closure that writing a summary affords. One student, for example, remarked after writing her first essay:

> I read each paragraph, figured out the main idea...and when I had a few main ideas, I wrote the paper and concentrated on each one of them--just going from one idea to the other--and it just fell into place, and everything was pretty much all right.

Her strategy is to go straight to a summary that follows the order of the text, and these remarks indicate that she has the metacognitive ability to explain in general what her primary writing strategy was, but not to explore why she employed it. This strategy seems simple enough--so simple, natural, or obvious that the student does not think to address, either in her essay or her comments on it the cultural factors that have motivated her *choosing* this strategy over other possible strategies. Further, she does not acknowledge that she could have used other strategies--tentative, explorative, questioning strategies--to approach the text. Why does this student, and others like her, feel the need to place closure on the text in the form of a summary, especially when she later proved capable of developing a more complex interpretation in a second draft? Why does she feel the need to have everything "fall into place?" Some would argue that having everything "fall into place" is a universal human desire, though at this point in our analysis, we should begin to recognize the ideological impulses behind assertions of universality. Experts in any field--from literary study to physics--know that things never fall into place, that they are always in a state of flux. The more one knows, the less one can be sure of. Nonetheless, television sit-coms, politicians, advertisements--all major ideological influences--tell us that we can attain closure, get it right, know (or have) it all. It is these ideological apparatuses--along with much of the educational system that values closure over exploration--that are influencing this student, and she is responding as sensitively and sensibly as can be expected under the circumstances.

As they are traditionally taught--despite the supposed wide-spread use of the process approach to writing in the classroom--interpretation and summary require students to focus on their final reading of a text rather than on their reading process, that is, to come to a conclusion, to achieve closure. Traditional interpretations and summaries generally demand that readers ignore or explain away any sense of ambiguity or confusion when they begin to write about a text they have just read--even if they found those to be characteristics of the text itself or had those reactions

themselves when reading. Tentativeness, students are taught, just isn't the way to go: it is often seen as a mark of an ignorant rather than an explorative mind.

A tentative reaction, unlike the seemingly objective summary, has costs and benefits for students, but most students seem to know only about the costs. Tentativeness can occur in expert writers' early drafts in many forms: they may write with a tentative prose style, asking a myriad of questions of themselves; they may write in a seemingly authoritative style, but include contradictory perspectives among which they know they will have to adjudicate in a later draft; they may ask questions of themselves parenthetically or in the margins of their drafts. Tentativeness suggests that problems or unresolved conflicts exist and that more reading and thinking needs to be done. Therefore, regardless of what form experts' writing takes in a first draft, it generally bespeaks an open-mindedness to revision, a willingness and an awareness of the need to rethink ideas. While most expert writers and teachers would probably agree that tentativeness almost always characterized their first drafts, they will frequently not accept it in their students' final drafts (which, alas, in many instances are also their first drafts). Thus students like the one quoted above learn to shut off nagging internal voices that suggest new ways to piece material together, or that suggest that the material doesn't fit at all. While many teachers want closure to occur in students' essays after they go through elaborate procedures of synthesizing the material for their own purposes, students get the message that they should reach closure immediately at any cost. And the cost is generally in terms of the subtlety and creativity of their own work (see Reports 6 and 7).

What are the advantages of students' writing more tentative responses to texts? First of all, it opens the text up to multiple interpretations rather than closing it off, thereby potentially giving students a voice in their essays. It makes the text available to readers with diverse perspectives and demands that the reader consider his or her perspective. Tentativeness implies that meaning is not derived solely from the text, but rather is produced as a result of a complex interaction of cognitive and cultural, as well as textual variables--any or all of which could possibly become the subject of analysis in a later draft. A tentative, open approach that stresses issues and questions rather than mere statement of "facts" further allows students to develop, and possibly even change, their position on the subject about which they are writing *during the course of their writing*. A tentative, as opposed to a closed approach, leaves interpretive options open and regards writing as an occasion for discovery rather than a tool for recording what is already known.

Tentativeness is a necessary part of the process model of writing which advocates that students and teachers focus on the writing act rather than just on the writing product. But without encouraging students to be tentative and without teaching them why a tentative, open, questioning approach can be regarded as a clearer sign of thinking than a paper that all "fits together," most students will be loath to try it. This is not to say that tentativeness must necessarily oppose coherence in an early draft, but rather that the desire for coherence frequently causes students to create closure prematurely, and that premature, superficial coherence is not preferable to the tentativeness of a complex argument (see Report 3).

The summary seems to be one quick, easy method for students to attain the near instantaneous closure teachers seem to demand because it is a process of both reading and writing that finally deemphasizes the dialogue in which the student engages when reading. Although a necessary and significant first step to understanding, the summary is an inadequate stopping point for more complex kinds of thinking. Many students, however, largely because of their desire for closure in both reading and writing, do not see it this way, and it seems that many are not being rewarded for developing an

alternative task representation. As Richard Richardson notes in *Literacy in the Open Access-College*, many students find themselves daily in "information-transfer courses" in which the teacher, using texts like ours on time management, "disseminates" (1983) information to the students and in which the students, by and large, play the role of the "attentive audience" or "active non-participants" (1983). In such situations, students attend class merely to take in information so that they can later give it back, unedited and pretty much unconsidered.

Institutional Encouragement to Write with Closure

In studying the French educational system, Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey (1978) observed that only "basic language" is taught in all French primary schools while "literary language" is taught in advanced levels. Such a division in the educational system allows one group of students to learn a language that is more highly valued in society than another. A similar stratification may exist in the American education system at even higher levels of education regarding the teaching of summarizing as opposed to critical thinking skills. Braxton and Nordvall (1985), for example, report that more selective (regarding admission standards) liberal arts colleges tend to demand "higher order levels of understanding" on course examinations than do less selective liberal arts colleges. By "higher order" Braxton and Nordvall, following Bloom's taxonomy, mean "application" and "critical thinking" questions. These are opposed to simple "knowledge" questions which were asked more predominantly at less selective liberal arts colleges. This data, however, should not encourage universities who place themselves in the first category to pat themselves blithely on the back. Most students whom we interviewed at Carnegie Mellon, after they had completed all phases of the time-management task and had been told that they were expected to develop a position of their own and integrate it with what they read, nonetheless reported that they would not immediately use sophisticated interpretive strategies when they wrote for another course. As one student commented, "It depends on what the teacher wants...They want you to analyze sometimes. But in a lot of cases what they want is just `list and gist.'" This student is suggesting, therefore, that, at least in his perception, a division exists within the university itself; many teachers ask questions requiring simple information transfer rather than more sophisticated interpretive strategies. Of course, this still leaves open the question of whether this student is correctly assessing the demands of these other instructors, whether he is missing their perhaps inexplicit cues that ask for more that a simple "list and gist."

Thus we can see two major reasons why students would try to produce closure in the form of a summary in their papers. The first results from a kind of misunderstanding between teachers and students. Teachers want a polished, organized, coherent, and unified final draft; students often want to write only one draft, and hence to achieve closure, by refusing to engage with the text in a questioning, tentative, or argumentative way. The second results from more significant institutional problems: training students at particular educational levels in only basic modes of thinking and writing; rewarding students in classes for "actively nonparticipating," for listening and giving back unreformulated information that the teacher has presented to them; requiring students to be capable of answering only simple "knowledge" questions. Both situations, the first indirectly, the second directly, fail to encourage students to think critically about the material they read, their responses to it, or their own opinions.

Why would teachers or entire educational systems develop programs of training and testing that ultimately inhibit rather than stimulate students' thought? Foucault suggests subtle ideological reasons for this practice. In "The Order of Discourse," he analyzes various procedures and principles by which the ideology of a society controls

and delimits discourse in order to insure the successful reproduction of the current social system. Among these is the principle of *rarefaction*, a process whereby one is encouraged to analyze a text, not to discover multiple and often contradictory meanings but in order to demonstrate a limited, single, unified meaning. The discovery and reproduction of a unified meaning in texts is just one way in which a society asserts its consistency and stability. A major procedure by which discourse is "rarefied" is through *commentary*. According to Foucault, commentary "allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is this text itself which is said, and in a sense completed" (1971). Although Foucault acknowledges that a commentary will always say something that the text upon which it is commenting did not say because a text cannot be reproduced objectively, he recognizes that commentary so defined "exorcises the chance element of discourse" because "by a paradox which it always displaces but never escapes, the commentary must say for the first time what had, nonetheless, already been said, and must tirelessly repeat what had, however, never been said" (1971). In other words, summary will necessarily differ from the sources it is summarizing, but its rhetorical and ideological strength lies in its supposed faithful reproduction or reduction of those sources rather than in its deviation from them.

The effacement or downplaying of differences between summaries or commentaries and their origin contributes to the particular sense of order, objectivity, and truth that are so much a part of any ideological system. One of the goals of the educational system is to teach students to function in the existing society. In so doing, it must necessarily give priority to those practices that will ensure the survival of established modes of thinking and marginalize (and frequently exclude) what Foucault terms "the chance elements" of discourse that could disrupt the existing order. One effective way of stifling the development of potentially disruptive discourse is to teach students that there is a greater value in learning to reproduce "faithfully" the "truths" that allegedly exist in already accepted texts than in learning to read against the grain for absences, for discontinuities, and for the purposes of developing a counter argument. While oppositional reading may remain within the accepted limits of a particular discourse, it runs a much greater risk of introducing disruptive chance elements that might themselves be true, but will not be, as Foucault says "in the true" (*dans le vrai*), that is not within the accepted discourse of one's time. If trained to avoid digressing from acceptable discourse, students writing an essay about something they have read will probably try to be as "true" to the text as they can, to try to keep out as many chance elements as possible. Such a goal can perhaps best be accomplished by writing a summary in which the new elements that students introduce are effaced and in which their own texts can be seen as subservient to the text they were assigned to read and write about.

The Goal of Objectivity:
The Need to Question the Subjective/Objective Paradigm

Some students felt a strong tension between their desire to be "objective" and their desire to develop their own ideas. The wish to be objective seems to derive from three related assumptions: first, students believe in (or at least act upon) a subjective/objective paradigm, that is, that opinions are either personal, emotional, and *subjective*, or factual, verifiable, and *objective*. Many appear to believe that an objectively true position on any subject can be attained. Second, students tend to attribute objectivity to the authority of an expert's printed opinion. Third, students seem to regard their own positions and ideas as subjective, personal, likely to be wrong, and lacking authority. One student, for example, who became so frustrated that he did not complete his time-management paper, commented in class:

> When I read, I tried to get just one idea out of the thing--just to condense each point ... and try and get it together....I did the same thing with writing, and it was really bad because I tried to just take it from a totally objective point of view....Finally I stopped and said I have to take this totally from my own point of view, but first I have to get a point of view. And I wasted so much time, that I never got done with the thing....And I'm really sorry I didn't keep going with it, because I did get some really good ideas.

Why is this student incapable of putting his own ideas on paper? What cultural and institutional pressures are simultaneously warring within him, one telling him to be "objective," the other to take a position of his own?

This student seems to be hampered by a belief in the subjective/objective paradigm. He wants, on the one hand, to overcome it, to get away from being "totally objective." He implies that his reasons for getting away from objectivity are that this stance is rather dull and also that he has been told in class to include his own opinions. On the other hand, however, he seems incapable of writing a paper using his own ideas, even if he thinks some of them were "really good." This student does not seem to know *how* to write a paper in which he uses his own ideas. Why should this be? Rather than lacking the cognitive capabilities necessary to integrate his own ideas into a paper, our work suggests that he lacks the practical strategies to do so. It is very likely, especially given other students' comments about their inabilities to use their own ideas, that this student's cognitive problem is culturally induced: he doesn't know how to use his own opinions in a paper because he has not been *taught* how to. In fact, in most circumstances, his perceived need to be "objective" has discouraged him from even trying.

Let us look at some comments of other students to further our understanding of the ways in which the subjective/objective paradigm constrains students' use for their own ideas. One student discussed in an interview why he didn't use his own opinions: "I've always had difficulty on formal papers bringing my own ideas. I never thought that was right." This student's choice of words suggests that he believes that it is almost immoral (or at least incorrect) to express his own opinion in an essay. He said that for him "interpreting [was] like summarizing." When asked whether he had ideas of his own to express, he said he most definitely did, but that it was wrong to bring them up and he demonstrated how the seemingly simple and innocent rule of not using "I" discussed above served to efface him as a thinking person with valuable ideas:

> They were always discouraging me from using "I." I always felt awkward in saying "the writer's opinion is." So I was never comfortable expressing my own ideas in a formal paper.

This student's teachers probably did not want him to interpret their instructions as he did. They most likely had in mind the idea that "I" is not necessary because whatever the writer states in his or her own paper is obviously his or her own opinion. But, as this student inferred, one can state many things in a paper that are not one's own opinions, but are, rather, the opinions of others--and since these opinions are in print, they often seem "correct." If always correct, the experts' opinions are, by extension, objective and true; the student's opinions, in contrast seem subjective, and likely to be at best, "inappropriate," at worst, wrong.

Another student stated:

> I didn't believe that it was right for me to put a lot of my own things into papers. I thought that I had to take a lot of things just from the text. And even with organizing concepts, a lot of times I would just take them from the text. I never had the feeling I had the right to have my own. I guess it's because I always figured that this person was the author. And if I was to be writing a paper, it would be more of a summary than an interpretation.

Underlying these comments is the sense that "the author" is a term one can give only to an expert. The student, although a writer of papers, is not in his own mind an author but a transcriber, a conduit through which information is passed rather than an organizer of information or a developer of new ideas. These three students are intimidated by what they perceive as experts' objective knowledge, and seem to feel unauthorized to explore and analyze their own opinions. Again we should remember that many students did express their own opinions quite freely in their protocols, class discussions, notes or interviews, and some did in their final papers, but that students often offered less developed opinions in their papers than they recorded elsewhere suggests an ambivalence regarding the appropriateness of using their own ideas in a formal essay.

Many proponents of the process model of writing have attempted to counter the objective model by asserting that the individual student writer is unique, and, therefore, must be allowed to express him of herself "freely." D. Gordon Rohman (1965) and Donald Stewart (1969) advocate the use of expressive theories of writing to help students like the one mentioned above get over the fear of using their own opinions. Rohman argues that "'good writing' must be the discovery by a responsible person of his uniqueness within his subject". While this subjective, expressive model of writing may be laudable in many respects, it can nonetheless put students in a bind that is as problematic as the traditional text-based, product-oriented, objective model. According to the expressive model, students must have integrity and be sincere, qualities which can supposedly be determined objectively by teachers but which in fact are always inferred by certain value judgments. So, although students are told to "be themselves," teachers still have the right to say whether or not they have been. Further, while students must rely solely on expert's opinions in the objective information-transfer situation, under the subjective paradigm, they must rely completely on themselves. This can lead to two obvious problems: students' drafts and papers can be loosely impressionistic, uncritical, and "touchy-feely" or simply misinformed because students are not encouraged to go "outside their own heads" for information. Expressive theories, therefore, like objective theories ignore the fact that the subjective/objective paradigm is a false one.

What are the implications for students of such a critique of the subjective/objective paradigm? What are the implications of their recognizing that there is no one correct and objective answer to a given problem? Many teachers are afraid that such a recognition might lead to a pernicious kind of relativism, that students will then think that "anything goes," and that they will argue that their own opinions, however vacuous or uninformed, are as valid as those of the most knowledgeable experts. Such a fear is unfounded for at least two reasons. First, it is still based on a residual assumption that if positions aren't objective, they will become subjective. Second, it assumes that we can't tell students an important piece of information that all of us know: that rival hypothesis exist, and that texts and contexts are always subject to multiple, overlapping, and frequently contradictory interpretations.

Failing to inform students about the reductiveness of the subject/object dichotomy is similar to the failure discussed above to teach students the value of maintaining a tentative position in early drafts of a paper. Most of us are opposed to thinking in black and white categories, yet if we imply to our students that they must, we are depriving them of creative and critical cognitive options in which we as writers, thinkers, and researchers, engage all the time. If students recognize and are required in their papers both to address the fact that experts disagree about almost every important issue today and to explore *why* those disagreements exist, they will not be plunged into relativism. They will discover that disagreements are not arbitrary, subjective, or a result of believing "anything goes": experts disagree because they develop arguments in diverse contexts and from divergent underlying assumptions. As a consequence of recognizing the situated-- not arbitrary--nature of all positions, students may see that in order to take a certain position themselves or to agree with a particular expert, they must explore (while reading) and explain (while writing) the assumptions underlying their particular stances. In taking a particular stance, they will also have to acknowledge that they are always choosing among diverse assumptions and that these choices must be justified. This justification cannot occur on the basis of an absolute "right" and "wrong," but must result from situating the positions in larger cultural contexts and examining the *contexts* in which an argument would seem "right." Such writing requires students to maintain positions of their own, to recognize and explain how these positions are situated, in short, to become articulate critical thinkers--a goal writing teachers have always cherished. This goal, however, can be attained only in a rich cultural context that rids itself of the subjective/objective paradigm, that situates the positions of experts, and that grants credibility to the positions of students by giving them, indeed requiring them, to develop a voice that must be as closely scrutinized as those of the experts.

One of the first steps in effecting this end, the subject of the next section, must be to get students to see that contradictions exist among experts and to recognize that it is the very presence of these contradictory positions that leaves room for them to enter meaningfully into the conversation.

The Avoidance of Contradiction

Categorizing Students' Essays

One of the most striking aspects of our students' responses to the time management text was that so few of them discussed the contradictions in their essays despite the fact that many students discussed these contradictions in their protocols. Many student essays did not even acknowledge that the text was comprised of extracts from various sources. Struck by this observation, we decided to categorize the essays into five types: in the first (0), students did not mention the contradictions; in the second (1), students mentioned the contradictions only in passing in the form of a summary; in the third (2), students attempted vaguely to reconcile the contradictions; in the fourth (3), students attempted to explain and analyze the contradictions in terms of larger cultural or cognitive considerations; and in the fifth (4), students noted the contradictions and attempted to resolve or explain them by presenting their own opinion. (See Table 1 for categorization of essays: this analysis is limited to the 57 essays for which both drafts and revisions were available.)

N = 114 (total number of essays)

coding	number of essays	percentages
0	76	67%
1	24	22%
2	3	2%
3	4	3%
4	7	6%

0 = did not mention contradictions
1 = mentioned contradictions but does not analyze
2 = attempted vaguely reconcile contradictions
3 = attempted to explain contradictions in terms of larger cultural and/or cognitive considerations
4 = acknowledged contradictions and developed own views on time management in the context of contradictions

Table 1. Students' Reactions to Contradictions

Recall that each student wrote a pair of essays. (Categorization of essay pairs occurs in Table 2.)

n = 57 (total number of pairs of essays)

coding	number of essay pairs	percentages
0/0	31	54%
0/1	7	12%
0/3	1	>2%
0/4	1	>2%
1/0	4	7%
1/1	3	5%
1/2	1	>2%
1/4	3	5%
2/1	2	3%
3/1	1	>2%
3/2	1	>2%
4/1	1	> 2%
4/4	1	> 2%

Table 2. Students' Reactions to Contradictions in Essay Pairs

Sixty-seven percent of all the essays written did not mention that contradictions existed in the text (0). Looking at the essays in pairs, 54% of the students did not mention the contradictions in either of their essays (pattern 0/0). This is the only significant pattern of pairing that occurred among the essay types.

Twenty-two percent of the essays were of the second type; students noted that the experts disagreed but mentioned this only in passing in summary form and, for most of their essay, ignored this fact. A student in this category typically opened his or her essay with a paragraph like the following:

> Time management has been the subject of numerous studies, but the issue is by no means resolved. Most experts agree, however, that an effective method of time management increases an individual's efficiency; what they do not agree on is how one should go about implementing such a program.

This particular student continues in five discrete paragraphs to summarize each of the five different sources but does not compare and contrast them in any way. By keeping each in an isolated paragraph she is able to avoid addressing the disagreements and contradictions among the sources. This pattern of mentioning the contradictions in the opening paragraphs and ignoring them for the rest of the essay was the most common one for essays of this type. Variations on this pattern included putting a paragraph such as the one quoted above at the end of the essay or putting one at both the beginning and the end. Regardless of their format, however, none of the essays in this category attempted to explain either why the experts disagreed or how they themselves agreed with the experts and disagreed with others.

Students who mentioned the contradictions in passing in one of their pairs of essays, unlike students in the first category, did not generally write in this manner for their other essay. Only three students stayed in this category for both of their essays. Other patterns, however, seemed random: 7 students moved from type 1 in their first essay to type 2 in their revised essay; 4 students moved from type 2 in their first essay to type 1 in their second essay; 8 other students moved either forward or backward into this category from other higher categories, but again no discernible pattern could be noticed nor did any significant differences occur between experimental and control students.

In the third category (2), students noted the contradictions among the writers cited in the text, and sought to reconcile them in a vague and general way, usually by suggesting that some general concept probably existed that might subsume all positions. Only three students (or 2%) did this, so we cannot discuss many "typical" characteristics of this kind of writing. We can nonetheless categorize students' attempts to reconcile divergent positions as "general" because they were neither developed nor expressed directly as students' own opinions. For example, one student wrote, after having distinguished between people who are "in a work situation" (according to him, the students) and people who are "detached from the actual places where time management is employed" (according to him, the researchers):

> Those involved in time management personally assume there is very little time and they must rush. Those observing and advising say there is lots of time and the slower you go the better. Perhaps if these two views could be integrated better, a full understanding of time management would result.

Note that this student does not say how how the two could be integrated, but expresses a wish that this integration might occur. The three essays that discussed contradictions in this manner did not follow any discernible pattern of combination with other essay types, that is, they did not seem to be related to the students' treatment of contradictions in their other essay.

In the fourth category (3), students sought to explain either the cultural or the cognitive reasons why such disagreements occurred. The four essays of this type set the contradictions in a broader cultural context and tried to explain why the contradictions might have occurred. Their explanations ranged from looking at the large context of various researchers studying different populations to the more local context of why contradictions occurred in the particular text they were given to read. What follows is the opening paragraph of one of the essays in this category.

> The value of the given texts is not in their content relating to the idea of "time management," because when considered in relation to this subject they provide no useful insights whatsoever. They are useful in another respect, however, and it ties in interestingly to the topic at hand, that is, time management. The true value of these texts is found by viewing the assignment as a whole and using them as examples of inadequate resource material. The point of this essay, therefore, is not to make a comprehensive statement about time-management, but rather to provide a different perspective for the instructor by examining the problems that can result when an open ended question is combined with limited reference material.

This student's ability to distance himself from the immediate subject matter of the text, to set his remarks in the context of his institutional setting, and to analyze both the cognitive and cultural effects of being given assignments such as this is indeed impressive. But that only 3% of the essays approach this assignment in this way must give us pause. I will consider some of the implications of results such as this later in the section. Essays in this category were not paired with other particular essay types.

In the final category (4), students not only noted the contradictions and tried to explain why they might exist, but also gave their own opinions both in an attempt to resolve or explain these differences, and to let their own voice be heard in the debate. Only 7 (or 6%) of the 114 essays was of this type, so, like the previous two categories, we cannot easily talk about a "typical" response. But one aspect these seven essays have in common is that the students offered their opinion on the issue, not just as something they tacked on to their essay at the end but as a direct response to their recognition of the contradictions within the text. For example, one student wrote:

> The dissimilarity of advice given by all these selections makes the reader tend to question their validity. What should the reader do to avoid being totally confused? I presume it is best for the reader to choose all of the bits of information s/he feels is best for his or her needs. It would seem that the following best suits me: schedule as much time as possible for study in a quiet, non-distracting environment...Do not read unnecessarily; work through mental fatigue whenever possible.

Again, little discernible pattern could be noticed in this category of essays except that apart from one student whose first and second essays acknowledged contradictions and developed a particular view on time management, four of the remaining five essays in this category occurred as second essays. No difference occurred between control or

experimental students, that is being told to write an "interpretation" as opposed to a "better" essay had no effect on students' capability to write about contradictions. This suggests that even when students are capable of seemingly more sophisticated writing tasks such as interpretation, they may still value closure and unity--even if it is superficial--over a more thoughtful analysis of ambiguity or contradiction (even if they discussed ambiguities or contradictions in their protocols).

Analyzing Students' Failure to Discuss Contradictions

One might argue that we are unfairly privileging the discussion of contradictions as a synthesizing concept when in fact a student could develop any number of equally valid or interesting synthesizing concepts that would not discuss the contradictions. (And it is clear that many of our students who did develop synthesizing concepts talked about something other than the contradictions.) Students' failure to discuss contradictions points not to an inability to organize an essay around *some* concept, but rather to a refusal to acknowledge in writing that a source text may not provide objective facts, and that it should be read critically rather than simply for information. Discussing the text's contradictions, therefore, is not just one of many possible synthesizing concepts students could have adopted. It is privileged here because it requires an ability to develop a position of one's own in direct conflict with an authoritative text that the other synthesizing concepts did not. Why, after all, did so few students choose to address the contradictions?

That over 65% of the student essays did not even mention the existence of contradictions in the assigned texts needs to be explained. Interviews and student in-class and protocol comments suggest that many more students observed the contradictions while reading than wrote about them in their papers. How can we account for this? It helps to examine both cognitive and cultural factors. A number of students may not have the strategies to write about contradictions just as they did not seem to have the strategies to write about their own opinions. Most students' task representations did not seem to regard mentioning contradictions as necessary or even relevant to the task--even if they themselves were very conscious of them. Some students, however, reported that suppressing or avoiding contradictions was part of their task representation--something that we would not have discovered merely by examining their papers. Why should students who perceive contradictions in a source text decide either that they are not relevant or are not appropriate to write about? This is a particularly important question since, as discussed in the previous section, experts disagree on almost every subject in every field from foreign policy, to economics to social history, to psychology, to time management, and it would seem that students should see the analysis of such disagreements as a viable paper topic.

Some students who did not write about the contradictions at all or in detail (that is, wrote either type 0 or type 1 essays) explained in interviews why they were reticent to do so. One student, for example, who mentioned the contradictions in a summary form in both his essays (type 1), provided insight in his interview as to why he did this. He argued quite forcefully that he recognized many contradictory points of view in the text but felt that he definitely could not say anything about these contradictions because he regarded contradictions as flaws in an essay and didn't want to have any in his. He felt that the only way he could resolve contradictions was to "use only the information that fit together." He seemed quite frustrated with his essays and the assignment, but his desire for a unified argument was so strong that he had to write a "resolution essay." He commented:

> There was so much information there that first of all I felt I should summarize everything I said...As I was reading through it, a lot of what was said was contradicting...In high school, I probably would have thrown out the information that contradicted and just used whatever information was there that I could use for my thesis. But here I just tried to think through everything until I resolved it.

Why does this student have such an intolerance for ambiguity or contradiction? He suggested that in high school he always had to make unified arguments and that he often did this by ignoring contradictory information. By the time he was interviewed, he sensed that this strategy was insufficient for the tasks of his college writing class. But because he has never been trained to write in a manner that could accommodate diverse perspectives and because he still was unsure that such writing was "correct," he reported that he would still be unable to write about contradictions in his future essays.

Another student who did not mention the contradictions in either of her essays (0/0), clearly acknowledged in her interview that she had noticed the contradictions when reading. Resolving them was one of the most difficult aspects of writing the essays for her because they kept preventing her from developing "one organizing concept over the whole thing:"

> And then some parts of the original information didn't fit in. It just didn't make sense with my organizing concept. And so I had to revise my organizing concept--my purpose--or what I thought was the purpose of the articles, until all of the information fit together.

The way this student was able to get around the difficult and, perhaps for her, insurmountable problem of writing about contradictions, was to write an exciting essay about the relationship of time management to success. She did not refer directly to the text on time management she had to read, but rather used the material indirectly for her own purpose of explaining how good time management leads to success. Although her essay has an obvious purpose, her interview suggests that it also has another purpose--one not obvious in the actual text, but one that is a very present absence--to avoid responding to the contradictions in the source text.

Using Cultural Theory to Supplement the Teaching of Reading and Writing

The desire to avoid contradictions can be seen as a corollary to the need for closure and the belief in objectivity, and these two culturally-learned beliefs may impede the development of the thinking strategies for invention and organization necessary to write effectively about contradictions. Some aspects of post-structuralist cultural theory can help students understand the situated nature of all information, which, in turn, could enable them to develop the strategic awareness needed to write about contradictions.

Students' reticence to discuss a text's contradictions is clearly both a cultural and cognitive problem. Some students may fear that in discussing a text critically they may be implicitly criticizing the authority of the teacher who they imagine thinks the essay is coherent. In such instances, students often find it safer to assume that the contradictions might be the product of their own inability to comprehend the essay, and they try, therefore, to explain them away or ignore them. Whether or not students respond to the teacher's authority, however, they are certainly aware of the authority of

the printed word--and that authority generally carries with it connotations of unity and consistency. Contemporary cultural criticism tries to dispel such textual authority by making readers aware that texts are always contradictory. As Roland Barthes says, "the text explodes and disperses" (1981); it always opens itself up to multiple and opposing readings. Even texts that appear coherent, therefore, can often be regarded as sites of struggle, as semiotic battlefields in which diverse and often contradictory meanings compete for dominance. Because the dominant meanings of words change over time and because, in any given cultural period, contradictory views exist on just about any subject, the meaning of a given text can never assuredly be pinned down. To encourage students to look for the cultural contradictions in the texts they read--in essays, fiction, film, newspaper stories, the evening news, poetry, rock music, as well as in their own material practices--and to make them realize that contradiction is a part of all our lives, can free them to look for and acknowledge contradictions in texts without impunity. This is hardly to suggest that students must always write essays about contradictions, but rather that unless students are taught that contradictions are a vital part of all their experiences, they cannot develop the strategic knowledge necessary to analyze contradictions and use them constructively in their own essays.

Becoming aware of the cultural factors operating in the reading situation will not cause students to abandon rigorous reading and writing practices. Far from it. Rather it can demand a level of critical thinking about students' own texts and the texts of others that will encourage students who discover contradictions in texts to explain them rather than explain them away. As one of our students wrote on the time management assignment:

> In my studies here at CMU two points have been emphasized over and over. First that questions should be answered in a clear, concise manner, and secondly that you must first support your claims with firm evidence. I believe both of these to be valid points and helpful guidelines and as such it is always my first goal, when approaching any writing assignment, to answer the question as asked. I begin the process by fully examining the question before reading or writing anything, then with the question firmly in mind I begin the assignment. Thus the form of the question is just as important as the answer.
>
> If a question is vague, or the reference material constraining, it will only frustrate the writing process, particularly in an academic environment. Here is where the problem ties in well to the given topic of time management. In the face of the unpredictability of academic life, involving various courses and assignments which change on a daily basis, scheduling time runs head on into the problem of uncertainty. An assignment based on a very broad question, when coupled with restricting reference material, puts a great strain on the writing process, particularly in the presence of additional pressures such as concern about the grading, or assignments due in other course. Our latest writing task is a perfect example of this problem.
>
> My initial problem with this particular assignment was the wording of the question itself. I was confused by the directions to write a"brief comprehensive" statement, which seemed to be a contradiction of terms. Next I read the texts and began to organize my thoughts as to their similarities and differences, in an effort to find a common theme. What I found by using these

> content strategies was that all of the authors believed that scheduling your time will help your production and organization. With this earthshaking revelation in mind I changed the direction of my analysis and turned to using situation strategies.
>
> As I considered the authors and topics some interesting questions came to mind: Who is Jean Guitton? Are the statements from the students representative of the entire group surveyed? What qualifies Alan Lakein as an efficiency expert? My point is that five points from five different sources, taken out of context, are a good basis for further investigation but are by no means a sound basis for a comprehensive statement about any subject matter. The only statement that I could legitimately make, based on the given reference material, is that there are different views on the subject of time management which revolve around a common theme of scheduling. This is definitely not the complete statement that the assignment calls for. As a result of this I found myself confused and my writing process completely frustrated.
>
> Thus the writing of a question is just as important as the answer. Academic assignments should be given careful consideration and be presented with clear expectations. The question, in turn, should be formed in a way that will convey these expectations to the student with equal clarity.

This student's essay is unusual in its ability to argue persuasively for an opinion that not only differs from the text but from the opinion he assumes that his teacher may hold. He is an older student and it seems that the seven years he spent outside of school has given him the ability to assess his institutional setting and to argue effectively and self-consciously for the value of his own opinion. He recognizes that there is no one right answer and hence he is not afraid to point out contradictions in the time-management essay, the assignment, and educational system, particularly when he feels these contradictions place unnecessary pressures on him.

But we cannot send our students away for seven years in hopes that they will discover "what they can't learn in school." Although it is important to recognize that some students who developed their own idea of what they were supposed to write about were able to write more comprehensive statements about time management than this student could, his comments and criticisms seem valid. We need to change some of what we teach our students so that they can learn what, paradoxically, we think we are already teaching them: to become critical thinkers, capable of reading carefully and writing persuasively; to recognize not just gross contradictions, but subtle nuances in texts; to explore the assumptions underlying those nuances; and, finally, to write interested and interesting essays.

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Appendix I

Interview Questions for Students

Opening Statement to Students

We found your series of assignments particularly interesting and would like to interview you to discover some more about your process of writing and your attitudes about writing. While any information we learn about your reading and writing process may eventually be shared with all the staff of the Reading-to-Write course, it will all remain confidential during this semester. In other words, there are no "right" answers to the questions you will be asked, and we are not grading you, but are, rather, only trying to gain more information on your particular reading and writing processes. The interview will be taped and at times I will be jotting down some notes just to insure that I understand all the points you are making.

Areas of Information to Explore in Interview:

I. Preliminary warm-up questions:

1. The assignment for your self interview required that you stop periodically, pause, think, and talk into the recorder. Can you reconstruct how this worked for you?

2. **Follow Up**: In general, did you feel comfortable doing the self interview? How did you react when you went back and listened to the tape?

3. Did the information you discussed about your *revision strategies* (we can fill in various terms here) seem useful to you in any way?

II. Students' definition of interpretation:

1. You've been learning a lot about interpretation in this course, and we would like to know how you would *now*, after x weeks, go about working on an essay that interpreted a text. What might you say are the three or four most important things you would need to know?

Interviewers will take notes while student explains relevant features of an interpretive essay and then ask the following:

Option A: **Follow Up:** (If student has been clear) I want to make sure I understand you correctly. Are you saying that to do an interpretation you must do x, y, z? (Wait for student to confirm)

Option B: (If student has not been clear) I want to make sure I understand you correctly. Are you saying that to do an interpretation you must do x, y, z? (Wait for confirmation) I'm not really sure what you mean by x. Could you please elaborate on this?

2. Does your sense of what you do when you interpret differ from what it was before you took this class? If so, in what ways?

III. Students' task definition

Bring out students' essays and response statement

Statement

When given a writing assignment, students often ask teachers, "What do you want," because they need to figure out how they're supposed to do the assignment. We want to get a sense of both what you decided you ought to do on the two essays you wrote and how you decided it. We also want to see if your sense of what you should do changed from the first to the second essay.
Show student first writing assignment and response statement and give time, if student desires, for him/her to look back over assignment.

1. Try to think back to when you wrote the first assignment. What did you think were the most important things your particular teacher in Reading-to-Write expected? Feel free to look over your first assignment and response statement before you reply. (Optional **FOLLOW UP**--see previous page)

2. Try to think back to when you wrote the second assignment. What did you think were the most important things your teacher expected? Feel free to look over your second assignment and response statement before you reply. (Optional **FOLLOW UP**--see previous page)

3. Did your sense of what was important in the second writing assignment differ from what you thought was important in the first? Why?

4. I'm really interested in how you figured out that you should do x. In deciding how to do an assignment, students often use various clues such as information written on the assignment itself, comments that they get from other students, points that are outlined in class discussion. **How** did you figure out that x was important for each of these assignments? (Optional **FOLLOW UP**--see previous page)

IV. Some Explicit questions on the costs and benefits of students' writing strategies.

I'm also interested in the writing strategies you used to write these two essays and in your rationale for doing so. In other words, I'd like to find out what you think the advantages and disadvantages or the benefits and costs are of using these strategies.

Bring out students' match for first and second essays

1. Here's a copy of the match exercise you completed on your first and second assignments. Could you explain what you feel are the advantages and disadvantages of using these particular strategies?

2. Did you consider using any other strategies on these assignments that for one reason or another you finally decided not to use?

Follow Up:

A. Are these strategies that you often use?

B. Why did you decide not to use them on these assignments?

3. Here's the strategies you thought expert writers would use on these assignments. Why do you think expert writers would use these strategies?

V. Closing Questions

1. What do you feel you have learned most from the course so far?

2. Do you plan/have you used some of the strategies for writing/reading learned in this course to other courses? Why/why not?